



SOF RENAISSANCE

PEOPLE | WIN | TRANSFORM





If you're reading this document, it's because you understand the value of Special Operations Forces (SOF) – from yesterday, to today, and into tomorrow. You know our unconventional approach to global challenges applies today more than ever and **fuels renewed relevance of SOF.**

A SOF Renaissance is now upon us! In an era where technological advancement is rapidly changing the character of war and threats are converging globally, our **eight decades of experience has tailor-made SOF** for Strategic Competition's return. It's in our DNA - speed of innovation, power of adaptability, comfortable in chaos - hallmarks of SOF since 1944. Combined with our decades of experience in crisis response and counterterrorism, we are now better than ever.

This pinnacle document - *SOF Renaissance: People Win Transform* - codifies our efforts to tackle the challenges of today and realize the opportunities that lie ahead. We've reached an inflection point, necessitating this timely update to our 2022 vision and strategy. Above all, **we will continue to learn and transform**, with a flexible formation ready to address whatever threats face the nation - just as we did for GWOT - while maintaining our global remit for rapid response to crises in distinctively SOF ways.

As we look back on the deliberate journey over the last two years, it's clear we have evolved, in how we balance the duality of our Service-like responsibilities with our role as a Global Combatant Command. This duality demands constant assessment of our priorities within ongoing missions, capability modernization, and force readiness. For this truly unique command, our vision encapsulates the direction for global SOF to continually provide options across competition, crisis, and conflict for the Joint Force and the nation. **The future of modern warfare is here, and SOF is ready.**



It's in our DNA - speed of innovation, power of adaptability, comfortable in chaos - hallmarks of SOF since 1944."



SHANE W. SHORTER
Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army
Command Senior Enlisted Leader

BRYAN P. FENTON
General, U.S. Army
Commander

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SOF RENAISSANCE A RENEWED RELEVANCE

THE PAST, NOW, AND TOMORROW

Special Operations Forces have a storied history of executing critical missions that shape conflicts and safeguard national interests. Since World War II and with the establishment of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in 1942, SOF units have been at the forefront of irregular warfare to achieve strategic objectives, supporting the Joint Force in high-end conflict. **The OSS legacy continues in modern SOF operations**, an approach President Kennedy recognized over 60 years ago. The nation recognized it then, and recognizes it again, now. The SOF Renaissance we are witnessing today **reaffirms SOF's core mission and traditional activities that remain deeply rooted within its DNA.**

“Our role lies not only in hastening military victory, but also in the development of unorthodox warfare, which alone constitutes a major contribution.”

— MG William “Wild Bill” Donovan, Founder of the Office of Strategic Services

The Vietnam War saw the rise of SOF, excelling in counterinsurgency and irregular warfare. The transformation of SOF in the 1980's led to the establishment of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in 1987, which unified various SOF units under a single command. By the 1990s, SOF's roles expanded in counterterrorism, foreign internal defense, and irregular warfare; as a result, operational tempo increased with demands in Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans.

The Global War on Terrorism ushered in a new era, SOF changed again, transforming from a force focused on irregular warfare to a force more focused on kinetic counterterrorism operations. SOF played crucial roles in dismantling terrorist networks and executing high-stakes missions, such as the raids in the Middle East that captured Saddam Hussein and led to Osama bin Laden's death.



“

I know that many of you may feel... that in these days of the nuclear age...that your service to your country will be only standing and waiting. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth... for we now know that it is wholly misleading to call this the “nuclear age,”...we are in a nuclear armed world, yet not at nuclear war. To cite....the range of responsibilities that will fall upon you; you may hold a position of command with our special forces, forces which are too unconventional to be called conventional, forces which are growing in number and importance and significance.”

— President, John F. Kennedy,
Remarks at the 1962 graduation
exercises at the United States Military
Academy in West Point, New York



These operations highlighted **SOF's unparalleled ability to adapt and innovate in the face of evolving threats**, but it also overshadowed numerous examples of SOF's enduring value.

In addition to the work in the Middle East, SOF remained true to its core activities in other regions around the globe - such as the Pacific and South America. There are numerous examples of SOF's enduring value through its persistent, global partnerships. In INDOPACOM, SOF partnered, trained, and assisted Philippines security forces (2001-2014), which maintained crucial diplomatic ties, eventually preventing the Duterte administration from formalizing their alignment with the PRC. In SOUTHCOM, SOF's three-decade effort in Colombia transformed it from a near-failed state to a NATO global partner. In EUCOM, SOF's 30-year partnership with Ukraine played a critical role in blunting Russia's 2022 invasion. Since 9/11, there remains a **misconception** that SOF is only a counterterrorism force. These examples demonstrate SOF's essence in **persistent engagement, maintaining strategic placement, and demonstrating tangible impact**.

Like a mutual fund, **small investments in relationships yield significant returns over time**. SOF will continue to be the improvisation partner of choice.

Today, SOF finds itself in a similar position to the 1940s, facing great power competition complexities. The increased coordination between China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea demands a strategic response. SOF's legacy of irregular warfare and strategic competition is deeply ingrained in its DNA. As we navigate this new era, the lessons of the past 80 years remind us that SOF's ability to adapt and innovate remains its greatest strength. This SOF Renaissance demands that we continue to lead, innovate, and excel as a bridge for strengthening and defending our nation. **The nation's main effort will always be USSOCOM's main effort.**



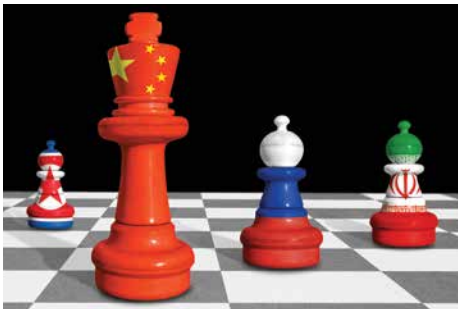
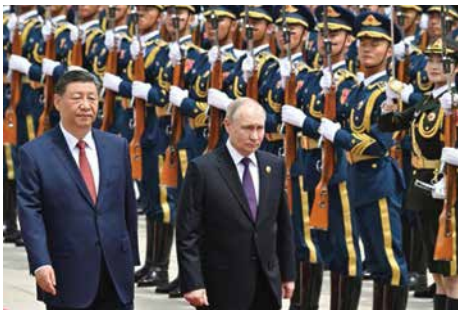
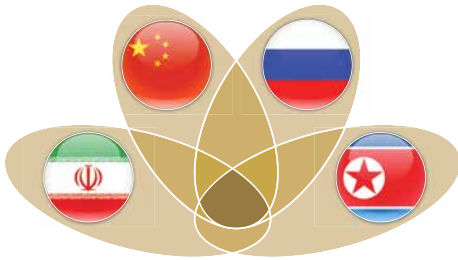
STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

THE CHALLENGE



The greatest macro task for the Department of Defense the next 10 years is to prevent great power war.”

— Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff



Iranian dhow caught smuggling advanced conventional weapons

CONVERGING THREATS

The National Defense Strategy (NDS) threats, are attempting to reshape the international order by posing significant challenges to global security and stability. Combined with a rapidly changing character of war, their convergence - **a fusion of foes** - is creating volatility and uncertainty as never before. This is challenging the rules-based order in place since World War II. PRC and Russia’s alignment on authoritarianism, coupled with their strategic partnership, **undermines efforts to maintain the rules-based international system.**

Threats Across the Instruments of National Power

The convergence of the threats stated in the NDS across diplomatic, information, military, and economic (DIME) domains presents a complex challenge in today’s global security landscape. In diplomacy, adversaries employ tactics to undermine international norms and institutions, often blurring lines between diplomacy and other instruments of national power. The information domain has become a critical battleground, with actors weaponizing information to shape perceptions and sow discord in the military domain. Economic instruments are wielded aggressively via tools of statecraft, including sanctions, strategic investments, and coercive practices. All of this is against a backdrop of their military power. Adversaries use a combination of conventional and unconventional methods to achieve military objectives without open conflict.

Geopolitical Dynamics: The Global Chess Game

More deliberate, strategic alignment between PRC and Russia is converging in diplomatic, informational, military, and economic realms. Under Xi Jinping, China’s Belt and Road Initiative and military modernization efforts, including its naval, air, and space expansion as well as cyber capabilities, reflect its ambitions to become a regional hegemon, committed to changing the international order in its quest to gain greater global control. **This expansion poses challenges to U.S. interests and allies.** This partnership, along with a possible inclusion of Iran and North Korea, underscores their shared interest in maintaining authoritarian stability and resisting rules-based norms and organizations.

Non-State Actors

VEOs and terrorism remain a consistent and persistent threat, with groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, Al Shabab, and ISIS playing an outsized role in regional conflicts. The Israel-Hamas conflict exemplifies how non-state actors can influence geopolitical stability, often drawing in major powers and complicating international relations. Broader concerns and implications for national security and sovereignty remain – made evident by Houthi actions in the Red Sea influencing international shipping routes.

CHANGING CHARACTER OF WAR

In addition to these converging threats and their employment of all levers of national power, the **fluid future of warfare** is also in motion. Driven by technological, geopolitical, and societal changes, the world is becoming more complex. With **ubiquitous technical surveillance**, a pervasive system of data collection enables targeting on people, activities, and locations utilizing various technologies such as online tracking, financial transactions, and mobile devices. Understanding the distinction between the evolving nature of war and its evolving character is **essential for SOF to maintain its place as a pathfinder for DoD, as we have trailblazed for decades.**

Technological Advancements

Innovations like cyber capabilities, AI, and autonomous systems are reshaping warfare, enabling more precise and lethal operations. Long-range precision weapons and cyber warfare compress decision-making cycles, increasing risks of miscalculation. SOF must be a **first-mover, early-adopter** to leverage these technologies to enhance irregular warfare capabilities in complex environments, as seen in Ukraine.

Artificial Intelligence and Uncrewed Systems

AI and uncrewed systems are changing warfare through increased automation and autonomy. This leads to more precise targeting and reduced risk to human personnel. The distinction between optimizing and generative AI is crucial and will be a game changer. Swarms of low-cost drones and remote explosive devices, using AI and autonomy, blur traditional human-machine boundaries on the battlefield. SOF must also use these systems to improve decision-making and situational awareness.

Power Computing, and Adaptive Manufacturing

Power computing enables real-time battlefield awareness. Additive manufacturing allows on-demand production of equipment in the field. The arrival of quantum computing will provide advantages to both sides. SOF will leverage these technologies for rapid, on-site production of mission-critical equipment and improved real-time data analysis.

Cyber, Space, Open Source Data, and Information Warfare

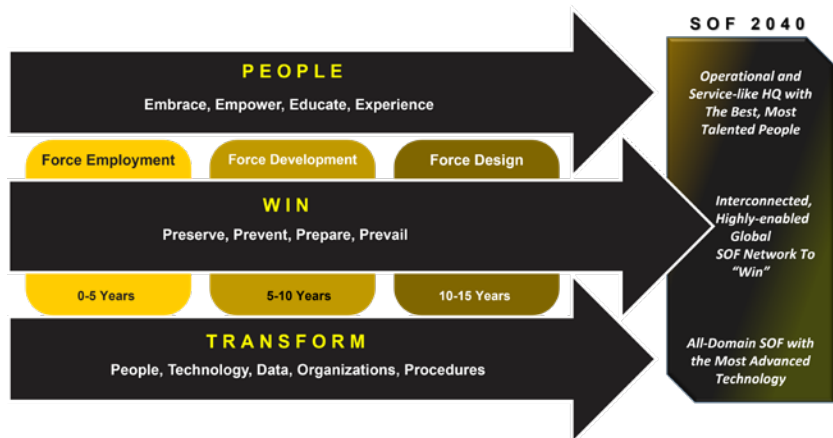
The rapid spread of information and misinformation through various networks is transforming the information environment. Information warfare influences public perception and strategic decision-making. Cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure have significant economic and security implications. Open source information whether satellite imagery or electromagnetic spectrum data serves as a key enabler, and SOF will use these domains to gain asymmetric advantages and shape the battlefield across multiple domains.



SOF AS A SOLUTION TAILOR-MADE FOR THIS ERA

The challenging world as described in the previous pages, is a world tailor-made for today’s Special Operations Forces. From the earliest days, SOF have used asymmetric, atypical, asynchronous approaches and technology to solve DoD’s and the Nation’s challenges. Today, and the future, will be no different.

People, Win, and Transform are US Special Operations Command’s enduring priorities. We see these priorities as critical to enduring operational imperatives and they formulate the foundation of USSOCOM’s Strategic Enterprise Plan (SEP). USSOCOM’s SEP establishes a road map to achieve endstates for future SOF.



PEOPLE
#1 Priority and Center of Gravity

WIN
SOF is unconventional, irregular, asymmetric, asynchronous

TRANSFORM
Trail-blaze and lead, for DoD and the Nation

PEOPLE: Strengthening the Resilience of the Force

Consistent with the first SOF Truth *Humans are More Important than Hardware*, our people are the comparative and competitive advantage for USSOCOM. Ensuring the readiness, resilience, and well-being of our men and women and their families remains our #1 priority. The unique nature of the SOF mission demands an extraordinarily talented workforce, capable of operating in remote and austere environments, working alongside our national, interagency, and global partners.

WIN: Decisive Advantage for the Nation

SOF provide a decisive advantage for the Nation as an integral part of the DoD’s approach to NDS priorities. Accounting for less than two percent of the Defense budget, and less than three percent of DoD personnel, SOF provide an exceptional return on investment. SOF prepare the global operating environment to enable the Joint Force to prevail in the event of conflict via providing innovative options to senior leaders, as well as multiple dilemmas to adversaries. USSOCOM also preserves strategic focus for the Nation by countering violent extremist organizations and responding to crises with agile, modernized, and tailored capabilities.

TRANSFORM: Modernize for the Future

USSOCOM aims to build enduring advantages by transforming our people, technologies, and organizations with a commitment to modernize, and optimize for the future operating environment. Our innovative, modernization efforts emphasize surface and subsurface maritime platforms; next-generation intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; mission command systems; and collaborative and autonomous unmanned systems.

PEOPLE

The SOF Talent Lifecycle

SOF talent management efforts start with rigorous assessment, evaluation, selection, and training for all SOF personnel. Once aboard, SOF personnel are developed through comprehensive training programs that focus on cognitive and physical growth. These programs use a holistic approach with embedded human-performance professionals and instructors to optimize training pathways. Creating a culture where individuals can thrive and contribute to mission success is critical and crucial to the SOF enterprise. SOF demands a broad range of talent across a breadth of factors - all in an effort to create an enterprise culture where many ideas compete and the best ideas win. When transitioning from military service, SOF programs and partnerships across the DoD and industry help ensure successful integration into new roles while capitalizing on the SOF skills and expertise developed while in USSOCOM.

Strength in Unity: POTFF

The Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) and the Warrior Care Program are the Command’s premier, performance-based programs to strengthen readiness and resilience for SOF personnel and their families by addressing SOF-unique challenges in a performance-based organization. The POTFF program exemplifies DoD’s focus on taking care of people while being a model for similar programs, such as the Air Force’s True North and the Army’s Holistic Health and Fitness programs. POTFF focuses on five domains: physical, psychological, cognitive, social (family), and spiritual. The combination of POTFF and the Warrior Care Program provides a continuum of support through performance enhancement, injury recovery, and transition assistance. All of this is done to highly enable the high performing organization that is SOF.

Brain Health: Trailblazing for the DoD

SOF lethality and readiness is an obligation to defend the nation, as is our commitment to safe training. USSOCOM has been a leader in brain health and continues to lead efforts to **follow the science** and take steps to better **understand, identify, mitigate, and treat every warfighter** in our formation. In partnership with Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, USSOCOM concluded *The Repeated Exposure to Blast (ReBlast) Study*, **the most comprehensive work of this kind to date**. The USSOCOM team is **committed to prioritizing this issue** – as well as our work in Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Our people are the most important resource. We will take steps to align with, lead, and inform the rest of the Department of Defense.

CHAMPION

USSOCOM Chief of Staff

#1 Priority and Center of Gravity. Our focus areas for **PEOPLE** are:

- Embrace,
- Empower,
- Educate,
- Experience.



CHAMPION

USSOCOM

Deputy Commander

SOF will “win” any time, any place.

Our focus areas for **WIN** will be:

- Prevent,
- Prepare,
- Prevail,
- Preserve.

WIN

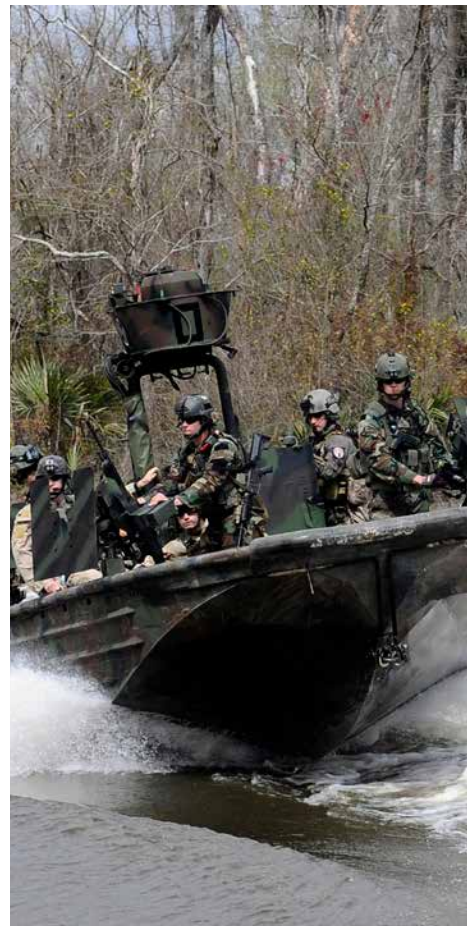
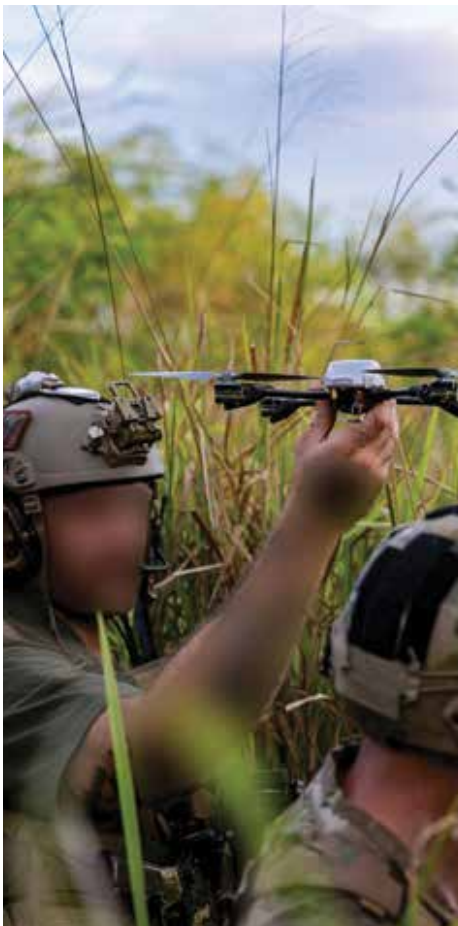
Anytime, Anywhere

Drawing upon decades of combat-experience and coalition credibility, SOF provide **tailorable, asymmetric options for our nation** while creating dilemmas for strategic competitors. With a range of options to deter aggression and counter coercion, SOF **leverage unique authorities to collaborate and operate with Allies and partners** – our greatest strategic advantage for tackling shared challenges.

The SOF enterprise stands committed to succeed for the nation by strengthening our partnerships, campaigning for deterrence, responding to crises, countering violent extremism, and leading in our DoD-wide responsibilities.

SOF play a critical role in three specific mission sets, as directed by the Secretary of Defense.

- **Strategic Competition:** Countering our adversaries use of statecraft by working day-to-day alongside Allies and partners in more than 80 countries to build partner capacity, execute irregular warfare concepts, provide unilateral options, and counter sophisticated adversary strategies below the threshold of armed conflict.
- **Crisis Response:** SOF provide rapid and flexible options for addressing emergent threats and challenges to US citizens and facilities abroad.
- **Counterterrorism operations:** SOF units continue to leverage their specialized skills and capabilities to protect the homeland by disrupting and degrading terrorist networks to prevent attacks on our Homeland and facilities overseas.



The How: Prevent, Prepare, Prevail, and Preserve

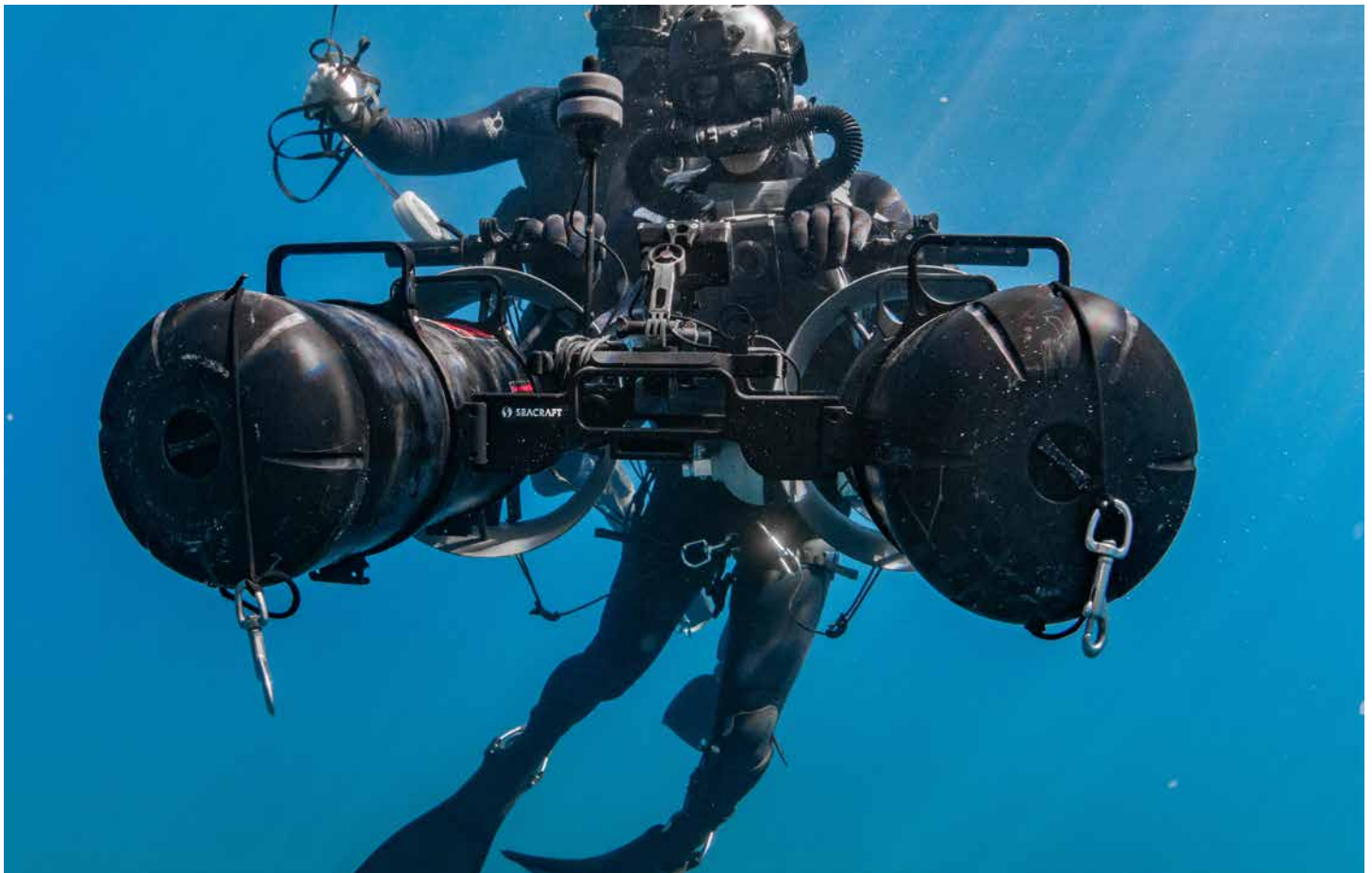
USSOCOM will apply strategic discipline in its allocation to ensure the best use of SOF. Within the WIN Line of Effort, SOF will succeed for the Nation through a Prevent, Prepare, Prevail, and Preserve construct.

Prevent: SOF shape the operational environment through persistent access and placement. SOF's value for the Joint Force includes shaping and effecting the adversary's decision calculus left of conflict.

Prepare: SOF prepare the operational environment through the strengthening of capabilities and readiness with our Allies and partners. USSOCOM's unique authorities for training and building partner capacity serve as a vehicle to maintain generational relationships and "burden share" against threats.

Prevail: USSOCOM employs SOF-unique capabilities and authorities to provide cost imposition on adversaries in contested and denied spaces in support of the Joint Force. SOF provide the Joint Force an essential warfighting advantage to prevail should conflict occur, via the prevent and prevail constructs.

Preserve: By maintaining the global remit on counterterrorism and crisis response – anytime, any place – SOF activities in that sector address and solve the strategic problems quickly in support of preserving strategic focus for the Joint Force, Department, and the nation.



CHAMPION

USSOCOM

Vice Commander

We will trail-blaze and lead, for DoD and the Nation to meet current and future challenges.

Our focus areas for **TRANSFORM** will be:

- People
- Technology,
- Organizations,
- Capabilities.

TRANSFORM**People, Technology, Organizations**

USSOCOM is building an enduring advantage through **investment in our people, technologies, organizations, and capabilities** with a “transform” commitment to innovate, modernize, and optimize for the current and future operating environment. With the direction of ASD(SO/LIC), USSOCOM is accelerating its wide-ranging modernization efforts and capitalizing on our Nation’s innovation ecosystem.

Building Enduring Advantages - Starts With People

Building enduring advantages starts with our people. We educate our people for uncertainty and train our people for ambiguity, as a hedge toward the contested, complex environments they will operate in. The SOF enterprise continues to modernize its capabilities and incorporate emerging technologies to build an enduring advantage. The Command leverages our **acquisition authority** to transform and modernize special operations capabilities in three key challenge areas: **assured access and preparation; all-domain deep sensing; and partnering for protraction.**

Automation and AI: SOF as early adopters

SOF have been, and will continue to be, a pathfinder for the Department in leveraging AI to support tactical operations. **SOF pioneered many successful capabilities the Services incorporate today**, such as the Project Maven Smart System. USSOCOM views the relationship of data, analytics, and AI not just as a tool, but as a strategic imperative to create advantages for the Joint Force. Optimizing health and human performance, enhancing mission planning rehearsals, streamlining predictive maintenance and logistics, and providing decision advantage enable our Joint Force with game-changing capabilities in contested, congested operational environments and hyper-transparent battlefields.





SOF Space Cyber: Silent, Orbital, Digital

The SOF-Space-Cyber triad represents a powerful convergence and synergy in modern warfare, combining the unique capabilities of special operations forces, space assets, and cyber operations. This integration enables on-the-ground intelligence, access, global communication, surveillance, information warfare and network disruption. Together, these elements create a force multiplier factor that enable the Joint Force to conduct operations with reduced risk of escalation.



SOF APPROACH TO THE NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY

CAMPAIGN ASSUMPTIONS

- Adversaries will continue to evolve gray zone activities.
- Non-traditional domains – information, cognitive, cyber, space – play an essential role in conflict.
- High demand for SOF will continue, with no reductions to SOF requirements.



SOF VALUE IN COMPETITION

USSOCOM's Campaign Plan – known formally as the Campaign Plan for Global Special Operations (CP-GSO) – articulates our focused approach to winning against threats by prioritizing **the best use of SOF across time, space, and purpose** to support the Joint Force. The CP-GSO guides how the USSOCOM enterprise will organize, train, and equip SOF through our service components, while employing SOF campaigning globally through our Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) and other subordinate unified commands. Additionally, it provides consistent SOF planning considerations to the Joint, Interagency, Inter-governmental, and Multinational (JIIM) Enterprise.

We execute our CP-GSO via our three lines of effort: (1) Main Effort = Strategic Competition; (2) Supporting Effort #1 = Crisis Response; (3) Supporting Effort #2 = Counterterrorism. Each serve as critical components to realize the campaign's strategic value proposition... to **Prevent, Prepare, Prevail, and Preserve**. These lines of effort communicate the USSOCOM Commander's guidance to the SOF enterprise, and JIIM stakeholders, on **the best use of SOF** and drives USSOCOM's responsibility to **develop, allocate, and resource global SOF**.

In our duality as both a Service-like organization and Global Combatant Command, USSOCOM views modernization, readiness, and operations through the prism of an Iron Triangle that is best kept in equilibrium. Our service components are subordinate commands with the mission to generate and organize, train, and equip service-specific special operations and enabler forces. Our TSOCs and other subordinate unified commands assigned to USSOCOM serve to perform operational missions, that enable preparation of the environment, crisis response, and counterterrorism.

CAMPAIGN APPROACH



WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE

SOF CONCEPT FOR WINNING IN STRATEGIC COMPETITION

The concept of What Winning Looks Like (WWLL) began in October 2022 and marked the journey of USSOCOM’s focus on peer or near-peer adversaries to cultivate a set of SOF-enabled conditions which describe how SOF contributes toward winning for the Joint Force in strategic competition.

The WWLL concept provides a framework to compete with and deter adversaries, within a geo-spatial context (generalized below) outlining SOF operations to counter NDS challenges. The winning conditions apply globally, absent any regional constraints from Geographic Combatant Commands, and the framework articulates required activities differently in each ring. Within this construct, there are actions in every ring that tie to the main effort of competing with, and deterring, our adversaries to prevent great power war, while simultaneously preparing the environment to prevail in conflict if deterrence fails. **Greater detail against specific adversaries can be found within the classified version of the CP-GSO.** This construct has been coordinated with the other Combatant Commands, the US Interagency, and applicable global SOF partners.

Furthermore, each of these rings plays a critical role in campaigning and contribute towards achieving effects aimed to support integrated deterrence. While no ring is necessarily more important than the other, our WWLL concept requires a synchronized, global approach to deliver effects and achieve strategic outcomes, because strategic competition transpires in the global arena.

CONDITIONS

Resilience and Resistance

Layered self-defense, hardened communication infrastructure, integrated security institutions

Adversary

Strategic and cognitive implications, sowing doubts

Joint Warfight

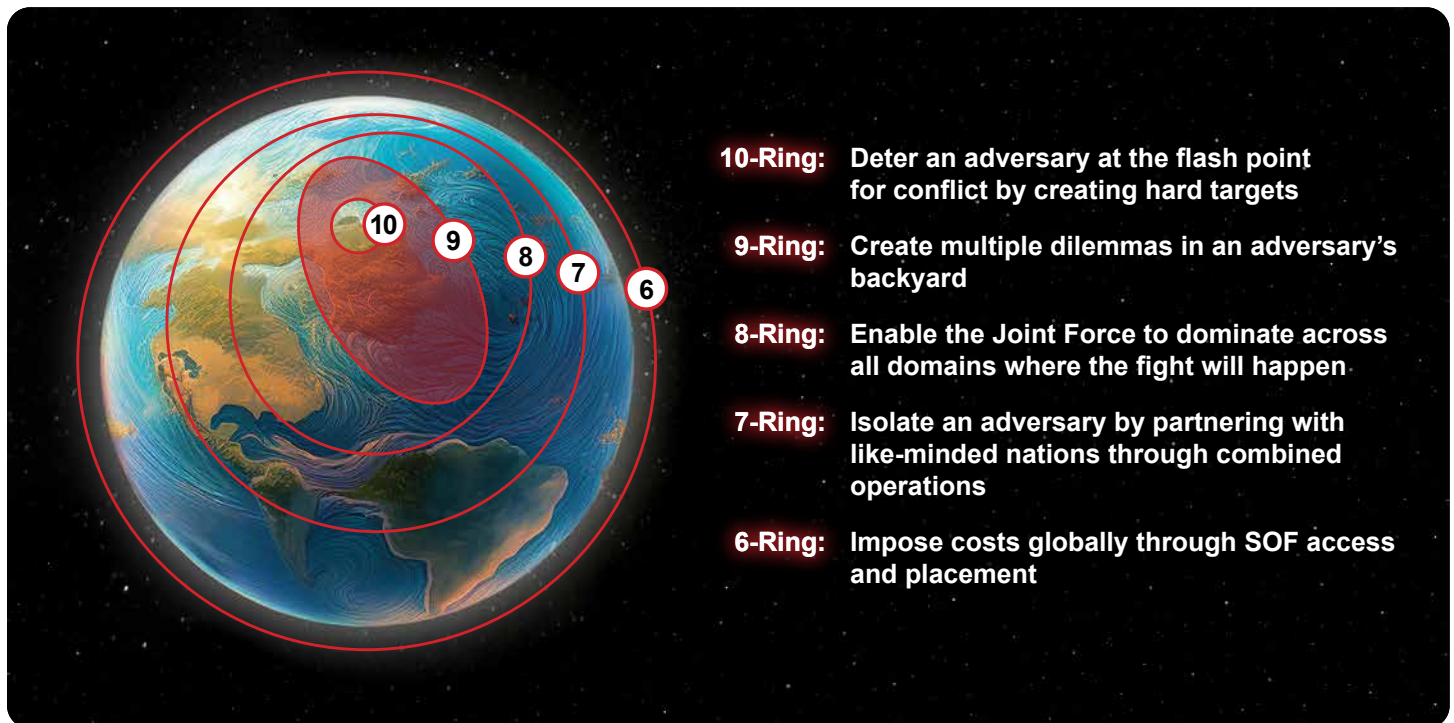
Asymmetric options and leverage, enabling multiple dilemmas for the adversary

Allies and Partners

Create a bulwark against an adversary, by strengthening relationships and capabilities

Access and Influence

Postured globally against an adversary to deliver networked effects and demonstrate local resolve



CRISIS RESPONSE (SUPPORTING EFFORT #1)

PRESERVING STRATEGIC FOCUS

SOF’s unparalleled people, technological superiority, and agility enable the execution of crisis response missions globally, on short notice.

As core activities, hostage rescue and recovery operations are critical components of our crisis response mission. These operations involve offensive measures to prevent, deter, preempt, and respond to incidents, including the protection and recapture of U.S. facilities and sensitive material overseas. Our ability to conduct these operations swiftly, precisely, credibly, and effectively is a testament to our training and our people.

The diverse capabilities and strategic importance of SOF in responding to global crises, enhancing security, and fostering international cooperation reinforces our commitment to protecting American lives, and allows U.S. government senior leaders to stay focused on NDS objectives.



“I am grateful for the unmatched skill of our service members who successfully brought [Sudan Embassy personnel] to safety.”

— President Biden, April 2023

Additional examples of SOF providing crisis response addressing global security challenges include:

AFRICOM: Embassy Evacuation: In April 2023, amid escalating violence in Sudan between rival military factions, SOF conducted a complex extraction of approximately 70 American diplomats and embassy staff in Khartoum. The successful evacuation underscored the critical role SOF play in safeguarding American interests and personnel abroad during times of crisis.

CENTCOM: Hostage Rescue: SOF hostage rescue operations demonstrate swift, decisive action through meticulous planning, interagency coordination, and the use of cutting-edge technology and equipment for rapid deployment to global hotspots. For example, SOF provided instrumental advise and assist support to Israeli forces in rescuing hostages taken by Hamas militants on October 7, 2023.

SOUTHCOM: Resolute Sentinel 2024: This multinational training exercise, involving forces from Peru and Colombia focused on enhancing regional security and interoperability. It included humanitarian assistance, disaster response, and counter-threat exercises.



COUNTERTERRORISM (SUPPORTING EFFORT #2)

PRESERVING STRATEGIC FOCUS

SOF’s focus on counterterrorism and countering violent extremist organizations (CVEO) is a **vital contribution to the Joint Force**, DoD, and National Security Council. Through our focus on missions related to counterterrorism and countering violent extremists organizations, SOF keeps violent actors and organizations away from the homeland and disrupts their operations in their regional bases in the Middle East and Africa while **preserving strategic focus for the Joint Force toward the NDS**.

Counterterrorism efforts are characterized by our unique unilateral and direct actions to disrupt the operations of ISIS, al Qaeda, and al-Shabaab, who have the intent and capability to conduct attacks outside of their regional influence aimed at the homeland or U.S. citizens abroad.

While we have unilateral capabilities, CVEO missions remain reliant on Allies and partners, for the monitoring of operations with emerging capabilities. For instance, our collaboration with African Union forces to counter al-Shabaab in Somalia has been crucial in **preventing the group from expanding its influence inside Somalia and having underground space to conduct external operations**. Another example is our support to French forces in the Sahel region, where we assisted in countering the spread of extremist groups like Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa.

In Syria, we keep pressure on ISIS by disrupting and degrading their global network personnel. While in the Philippines, our decades long presence has enabled the Armed Forces of the Philippines to significantly degrade ISIS-East Asia Senior leadership and operational personnel.

By maintaining pressure on these groups and building resilient local forces, SOF ensures that the U.S. and its Allies can focus on broader challenges outlined by the NDS without the strategic distractions that these type of challenges can give our senior national leadership, thus preserving the U.S. government’s strategic focus.



We are making the case that the SOF enterprise is not only the ‘CT force’; however, it’s key for us to have sustainable counterterrorism operations that prevent terrorists’ actions and ensure we are not distracted from longer-term strategic priorities, such as peer adversaries.”

— Assistant Secretary of Defense, SO/LIC, February 2024



WHAT WINNING NEEDS

RESOURCING SOF TO WIN

FOCUS AREAS

- Assured Access and Preparation
- All-Domain Deep Sensing
- Partnering for Protraction

DESIGNING THE FUTURE SOF FORCE

To continue “winning” in the future, as in the past, we know SOF will need resourcing for transformation. As we look to the future, we can see a changing world where SOF is required to conduct full spectrum Special Operations that **illuminate challenges and offer new options** to the Joint Force in campaigning, crisis, and conflict. All of this, is in support of expanding the Nation’s access and awareness across the globe.

Resourcing, Modernization, and Experimentation

Guided by our Campaign Plan for Global Special Operations mentioned earlier, modernization and resourcing ultimately provide the capabilities allowing SOF to generate effects in support of the Joint Force. SOF’s transformational efforts are geared toward **becoming our competitor’s most unpredictable adversary**. Ensuring this transformation in the face of today’s strategic landscape requires **innovative force designs regarding how SOF will fight** in the future. This demands a joint, all-domain, SOF formation that utilizes time-tested SOF concepts, approaches, and techniques, with modern day technology and SOF-Space-Cyber convergence... all while adapting to the complexities of a converging threat and changing character of war. Finally, SOF **experimentation and wargaming** aim to introduce futuristic concepts in evolving operational environments, with a particular focus on capabilities tied to *how SOF fights*.

How SOF Fights: Evolve or Dissolve

To support the Joint Force, SOF must synchronize effects across the range of military operations, **from seabed to space and cyber to fiber**, in support of the Joint Force Commander. To do this, SOF will fight to achieve desired outcomes across three focus areas: **Assured Access and Preparation, All-Domain Deep Sensing, and Partnering for Protraction**. Investments in Assured Access and Preparation enable access in environments that shift from contested to denied all to **enable Joint Force maneuver within the Weapons Engagement Zone** as SOF serves as a critical piece of the “inside force.”



AI generated illustration



AI generated illustration

SIZING AND SHAPING THE FUTURE SOF FORCE

The Department of Defense faces ongoing challenges determining the appropriate size and composition of its forces, especially those needed to create advantages and opportunities for the Joint Force prior to conflict.

Calibrating Capacity and Capability

Drafted in the 2025 NDAA, the Secretary of Defense was directed to develop a methodology for analyzing United States **military force sizing necessary to conduct activities in support of strategic competition, focused on prior to potential conflict**. The concept of sizing forces “left of conflict” involves preparing and structuring military capabilities to address and deter potential threats **before they escalate into full-scale conflicts**.

SOF plays a crucial role in these types of operations, using non-conventional tactics essential for deterring adversaries without resorting to open conflict. The importance of SOF is underscored by its role in irregular deterrence, **integrating cyber, space, and information operations capabilities to achieve strategic effects**. Moreover, the capabilities of SOF also allow for traditional combat roles, contested logistics, atypical psychological operations, and civil affairs.

In response to these challenges, the Office of ASD Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict has developed a Center for SOF Analysis to analyze force sizing and shaping for SOF with greater rigor. As a result, this will contribute to the Department force sizing and shaping efforts to balance **immediate readiness, strategic flexibility, and long-term capabilities**.



Combined with their connections to allies and partners, SOF are indispensable. SOF’s greatest power is creating early leverage in deterring conflict, which is the U.S. military’s highest duty. We are underinvested [in SOF].”

— Commander, USINDOPACOM,
August 14, 2024



HOW WINNING HAPPENS

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

SOF SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL PROBLEMS

Converging threats, coupled with the changing character of war, amplifies the magnitude of the challenges we face in the future. The challenge is too vast, the chore list too long, the stakes too high, for any entity to do it alone. In that vein, by leveraging unique capabilities, access, and placement, SOF play a crucial role in facilitating global solutions for various global challenges.



Synergy Across all Instruments of National Power

SOF provide substantial value as critical connective tissue across diplomatic, informational, military, and economic realms by leveraging a comprehensive approach to integrate various instruments of national power. Examples include:

- **Diplomatic Engagement:** SOF enhance diplomatic efforts through generational relationships with local populations and governments to support broader diplomatic objectives.
- **Informational Advantage:** SOF role in Military Information Support Operations and Civil Affairs play a crucial role in countering, exploiting, and disrupting adversary global information operations. This includes strategic messaging to disrupt adversary narratives and enhance support for U.S. diplomatic effort via public domain.
- **Techno-Economic Warfare:** Through its coordinating authority for counter-threat finance, and long established relationships with the Commerce and Treasury Departments, SOF offer a unique capability by identifying adversarial military-industrial complex vulnerabilities within global markets and provide early warning for decision-makers. This is accomplished through the collection, analysis, and dissemination of publicly available financial and economic information, targeting capital flows and transactions that threaten national security interests.
- **Interagency Collaboration:** SOF work closely with global security stakeholders to enable a coordinated approach across diplomatic, informational, military, and economic levers. This involves navigating and connecting complex interagency relationships to leverage all resources available in strategic competition.



We’re at the red-hot center of national security and economic competitiveness...and we’re connected at the hip [with the military and intelligence communities]. So many people in government just play it safe — you’re not going to get anything done that way. Don’t be afraid to speak up, don’t be afraid to try for something big. Judge yourself on impact.”

— Secretary of Commerce,
August 16, 2024

SOF FUTURE IS NOW TAILOR-MADE FOR A COMPLEX WORLD

SOF Renaissance is not a distant vision - it is unfolding before our eyes. As global threats evolve and technology advances at a breakneck pace, SOF units are at the forefront of a transformative period that **blends old and new concepts, as well as the art and science of warfare**. This renaissance is characterized by increased demand for SOF, incredible technological innovation, and a recalibration towards great power competition.

The mission landscape is shifting dramatically. SOF units are adapting to counter the **convergence of adversaries** like PRC, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, while addressing an increased focus on strategic competition and crisis response, often in contested environments where traditional support may be limited. Yet with each new challenge, SOF builds greater experiences, competencies, and adaptability, by leveraging clandestine operations and sensitive activities to provide more options for national level leadership. At USSOCOM, the call to action remains a continuous reassessment of our **readiness, missions, and modernization**.

This epoch represents a **pivotal moment at USSOCOM** - a renaissance of sorts. SOF's decades-long legacy of problem-solving, courage, relentless determination and incredible outcomes uniquely positions our elite units to tackle 21st-century security challenges. By embracing cutting-edge technologies like autonomous systems, adaptive printing, cyber, space, and seabed approaches - SOF teams will continue to punch far above their weight. Using artificial intelligence to enhance warfighter performance and decision-making further enables new lightweight precision weapons and uncrewed systems to expand SOF's lethal and non-lethal capabilities.

The future of SOF is now. Our **People** will continue to be the tip of the spear, creating dilemmas for adversaries, options for the Joint Force, reassuring Allies, and responding to crises with unmatched speed and precision to **Win**. The SOF Renaissance ensures America's SOF remain the world's most capable force, prepared to **Transform** and meet any challenge in this decisive decade and beyond...and always making the nation's main effort our main effort.





April 11, 1962

Another military dimension -- “guerilla warfare” -- has necessarily been added to the American profession of arms. The literal translation of guerilla warfare -- “a little war” -- is hardly applicable to this ancient, but at the same time, modern threat. I note that the [Joint Force] has several terms which describe the various facets of the current struggles: wars of subversion, covert aggression, and, in broad professional terms, special warfare or unconventional warfare.

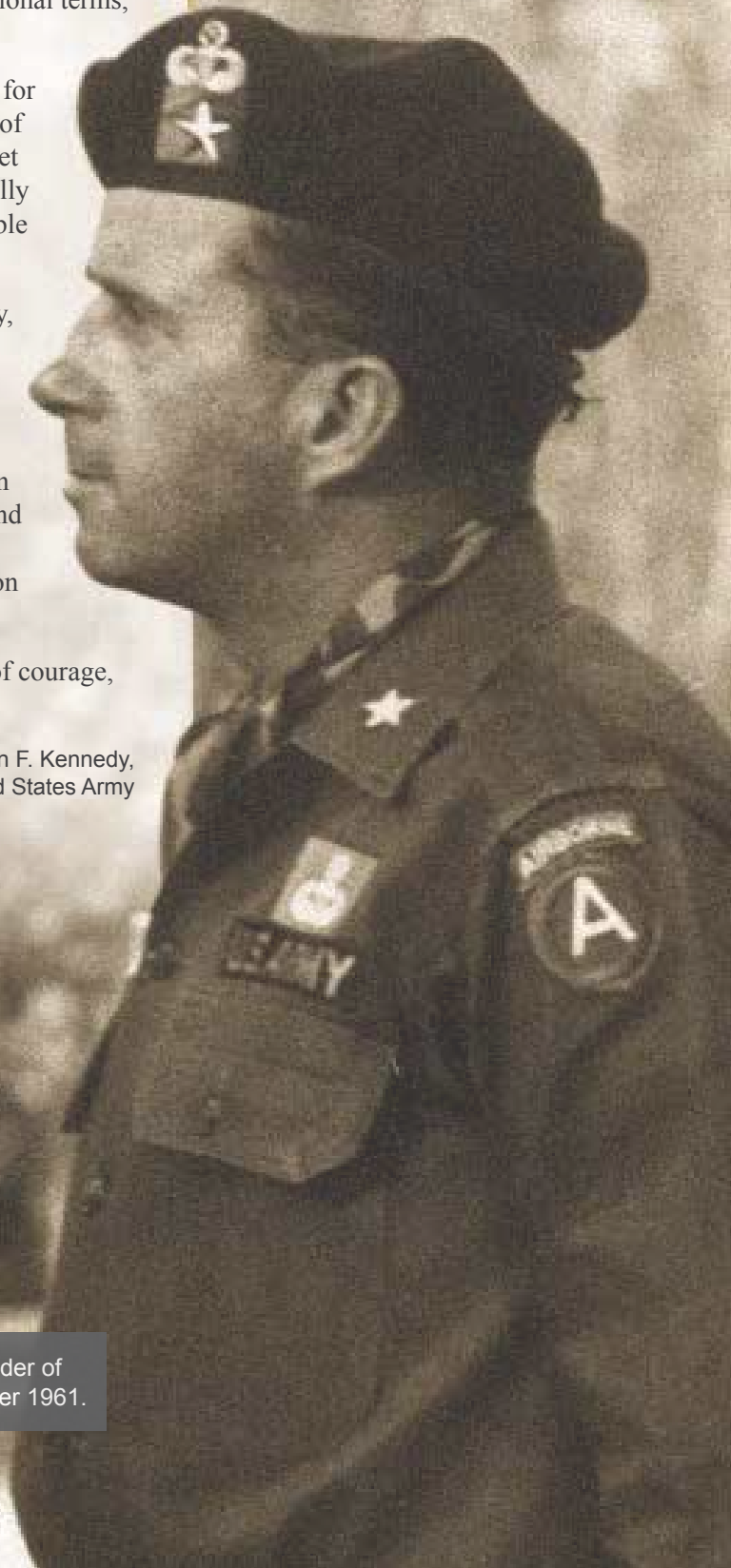
By whatever name, this militant challenge to freedom calls for an improvement and enlargement of our own development of techniques and tactics, communications and logistics to meet this threat. The mission of our Armed Forces -- and especially today -- is to master these skills and techniques and to be able to help those who have the will to help themselves.

Pure military skill is not enough. A full spectrum of military, para-military, and civil action must be blended to produce success. The enemy uses economic and political warfare, propoganda and naked military aggression in an endless combination to oppose a free choice of government, and suppress the rights of the individual by terror, by subversion and by force of arms. To win in this struggle, our officers and men must understand and combine the political, economic and civil actions with skilled military efforts in the execution of this mission.

[SOF] is again becoming a symbol of excellence, a badge of courage, a mark of distinction in the fight for freedom.

— President, John F. Kennedy,
Letter to the AR7/Special Warfare/United States Army

President Kennedy speaking with General Yarborough, commander of the Special Warfare Center, during his visit to Ft. Bragg in October 1961.



UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

